

Dr. Octavius Lumaghi – A Collinsville Icon

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During the nineteenth century many Italians took their first steps on United States soil seeking a better life for their families. The place that they came to has now become a legend – Ellis Island. In the 1880s, they numbered 300,000; in the 1890s, 600,000; in the decade after that, more than two million. By 1920, when immigration began to taper off, more than four million Italians had come to the United States, and represented more than 10 percent of the nation's foreign-born population.

With the onset of Italian immigration, did any of them have an impact on the town of Collinsville, Illinois? The answer is yes. One Italian immigrant made a huge impact on the town – through medicine, mines, the Catholic Church, business, and civic affairs. This immigrant was Dr. Octavius Lumaghi, who was born in Milan in 1821 and was a graduate of the Universities of Milan and Paris. He emigrated when local political unrest upset living conditions there. In 1845, Dr. Lumaghi came to St. Louis to start his medical practice. During the time of the St. Louis cholera and malaria epidemics in 1854, he decided to build a country home in Collinsville.

In 1865 the railroad came to Collinsville and went right past Dr. Lumaghi's home. That is when he got the idea to develop a zinc works on his land. In 1871 he sank Lumaghi Mine No. 1. In 1894 the family opened mine No. 2 and No. 3 opened seven years later. After World War II they sank mine No. 4. During this time he encouraged many Italians to come to Collinsville to work in his mines when the mines in Colorado were shut down due to strikes. As the miners poured in, the city began to grow,

establishing more and more businesses. In 1885 a new city hall, designed in the Italianate style, was built and continues to be used. By 1922, 3,000 coal miners and their families made up almost a third of the city's 9,800 residents. In December 1918, the coal miners pooled their money and opened the Miners Institute, a cornerstone in downtown Collinsville. The building, now called the Miners Theatre, houses a theatre, shops and other businesses.

Lumaghi is also credited with starting the local Catholic Church. Since there was no Catholic Church in Collinsville, Lumaghi held church services in his home and he had Father Carroll from Alton officiate at the services. In 1856 he and fellow Catholics in the community had a frame building erected for the church. In 1880 they started the construction of the brick sanctuary and transept and completed it in 1890 with the erection of the nave and steeple.

Lumaghi also brought one of America's favorite pastimes, baseball, to Collinsville. In 1885 he had the Lumaghi Colts baseball team that played their games at the nearby zinc works. Lumaghi's youngest son, Louis, was the team pitcher. The town of Collinsville loved to watch their team play ball.

Lumaghi and his wife, Anna McLaughlin of St. Louis, had two sons who carried on the Lumaghi business. Their oldest son, Joseph, was born in Collinsville in 1861 and he preferred the business and office end of the family's vast holdings. Their youngest son, Louis, was born in 1862 and was loved and respected by all. Louis ran the family operation. Louis also served two terms as the eighth mayor of Collinsville, from 1901 to 1905. He was instrumental in developing modern city facilities with the construction of the waterworks. He was the director of the state bank for many years.

The Lumaghi family was one of many successful Italian families to migrate to Collinsville. Through Dr. Lumaghi's dreams, he was able to lay the groundwork for much of Collinsville's growth and prosperity. The town of Collinsville still sees the positive impacts that their family has made. For the town of Collinsville, the Lumaghi family will be remembered forever. [From James V. Gill, *An Historical Survey of the City of Collinsville*; Gilbert W. Killinger, *Collinsville Bicentennial*; The Library of Congress, "Immigration. . . Italian: The Great Arrival," <<http://memory.loc.gov>> (Sept. 10, 2007); *SS. Peter & Paul Catholic Church*; and Lucille M. Stehman, *A Pictorial History of Collinsville Illinois*.]